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# Laying the Foundation for Integration

The Role of Counsellors Working with Unaccompanied Minors

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<p>This study is a final thesis that was carried out in collaboration with Lukkarila Family Group Home for Unaccompanied Minors. The aim of the study was to find out how counsellors can support unaccompanied minors in laying a foundation for integration. This question was answered by collecting qualitative data from the counsellors working at Lukkarila and conducting a study about their role in laying the foundation for integration of unaccompanied minors.</p> <p>The data were collected through semi-structured themed interviews with counsellors. The data were then analysed using qualitative content analysis method and as a result, I obtained an insight into the role of counsellors in supporting integration from the perspective of the counsellors who participated in this study. This further inspired the result and the conclusion of this study.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of this study is social pedagogy and the concepts of empowerment and participation in relation to integration. We learn from this study that the principles of social pedagogy, empowerment and participation all contribute in supporting integration. These principles should therefore be put into practice by counsellors working with unaccompanied minors.</p> <p>The results/conclusions of this study discusses seven factors that affect the integration of unaccompanied minors at a local level and looks into the role of counsellors promoting, enabling and facilitating the things that affect the integration of unaccompanied minors. Thereby, laying the foundation for integration. The results and conclusions were further summarised into a guide to increase the value and accessibility of this study to the working life partner.</p>	
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<p>Tämä tutkimus on lopputyö, joka on suoritettu yhteistyössä, yksin maahan tulevien alaikäisten turvapaikanhakijoiden perheryhmäkoti Lukkarilan kanssa. Tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli selvittää, kuinka ohjaajat voivat tukea yksin maahan tulevia alaikäisiä luomaan perustan kotoutumiselle. Kysymykseen haettiin vastausta keräämällä tietoa kvalitatiivisin menetelmin Lukkarilassa työskenteleviltä ohjaajilta ja tutkimalla heidän rooliaan alaikäisten yksin maahan tulleiden kotoutumisessa.</p> <p>Tiedot kerättiin puolistrukturoiduilla teemahaastatteluilla ohjaajien kanssa. Tiedot analysoitiin käyttäen sisällönanalyysimenetelmää, jonka kautta sain tietoa ohjaajien roolista kotoutumisen tukemisessa tutkimukseen osallistuneiden ohjaajien näkökulmasta. Tällä oli vaikutusta tutkimuksen lopputuloksiin ja johtopäätöksiin.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen teoriakehys on sosiaalipedagogia ja käsitteet voimaantuminen ja osallistuminen kotoutumisessa. Tutkimuksesta käy ilmi, että sosiaalipedagogian, voimaantumisen ja osallistumisen periaatteet tukevat kotoutumista. Kaikkien alaikäisten yksin maahan tulevien, kanssa työskentelevien pitäisi siksi ottaa nämä periaatteet käytäntöön.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset käsittelevät seitsemää seikkaa, jotka vaikuttavat yksin tulevien alaikäisten kotoutumiseen paikallistasolla ja tutkivat ohjaajien roolia yksin tulevien alaikäisten kotoutumisen edistämisessä, mahdollistamisessa ja helpottamisessa ja tällä tavalla perustan luomisessa kotoutumiseen. Tutkimuksen tulokset ja johtopäätökset on koottu oppaassa, jotta ne olisivat helpommin tutkimukseen osallistuneiden saatavilla ja käytettävissä.</p>	
Avainsanat	yksin maahan tulleet alaikäiset, kotoutuminen, osallistuminen, voimaantuminen, ohjaajat

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## 1 Introduction

Finland is increasingly becoming culturally diverse. In other words, people living in Finland nowadays represent a mixture of different social, religious and cultural backgrounds. According to the Ministry of the Interior, a total of 30,300 people moved to Finland in 2013. 7,860 of that population were Finnish citizens moving back to Finland. Therefore, a total of 22,440 foreigners immigrated to Finland in 2013 alone. By the end of 2012, there were 195,511 immigrants living in Finland i.e. 3.6 per cent of the total population (Immigration to Finland.)

These differences and diversities existing within the population of Finland have created a necessity for the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and the Reception of Asylum seekers. The Act seeks to promote the integration, equality and freedom of choice of immigrants through measures supporting the attainment of principal skills and knowledge required in society. Basically, the Act aims at creating cohesion in the society by providing measures to promote immigrant integration, empower immigrants and promote their prospects of participating in the Finnish society. (Laki Maahanmuuttajien Kottouttamisesta ja Turvapaikanhakijoiden Vastanojasta.)

This final thesis is about laying the foundation for integration and specifically looking in to how counsellors working with unaccompanied minors can help support their integration. According to article 2 (f) of Council Directive (2001), an unaccompanied minor is a person below the age of eighteen who seeks asylum or is a refugee without a parent or guardian.

This study was executed in collaboration with Lukkarila family group home for unaccompanied minors. The aim was to find out how counsellors working with unaccompanied minors can help build a strong foundation for integration so that unaccompanied minors can feel empowered to participate in their lives and in the Finnish community. Furthermore, this means that these minors can already have a foundation for integration to continue building on when they eventually leave the group home.

The target group for this study is counsellors working with unaccompanied minors. However, this study is intended to benefit both counsellors and unaccompanied minors.

Counsellors can use the outcome of this study to guide them in laying the foundation for integration and unaccompanied minors can benefit from the support of counsellors in acquiring skills that can facilitate their integration.

This target group was chosen for this study because refugees face the same challenges integrating in a new society as other immigrant groups and in addition to these challenges, refugees also face challenges that are specific to them as refugees. Furthermore, unaccompanied minors may also have challenges specific to them as they have come to Finland without their parents. These additional challenges are mainly due to the fact that other immigrant groups are considered voluntary migrants while refugees are forced to move. This forced movement, creates other additional problems that may make integration more challenging to them than other immigrant groups.

This study was carried out from the point of view of counsellors because other professionals working with unaccompanied minors, such as the police, social workers, health care officials, immigration authorities and other professionals from the third sector, may not have as much contact with these minors as counsellors do. Counsellors work in the family group home and are involved with the everyday life of unaccompanied minors.

The theory of social pedagogy and the concepts of empowerment, participation and integration form the theoretical and conceptual framework for this study. Qualitative research method is used to gather data for this study. The interview themes, questions and the implementation process in general reflect the theories used in this study.

## **2 Lukkarila Family Group Home for Unaccompanied Minors**

As mentioned earlier, this study was carried out in cooperation with Lukkarila family group home for unaccompanied minors. This section tells more about Lukkarila family group home which will be referred to henceforth simply as Lukkarila.

The history of the Lukkarila estate and family dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Kontio-lahti council bought the estate in 1936 from the Lukkarinen family from whom the name of the home was derived. Lukkarila was completely renovated at the end of the 1990's

and has been functioning as a family group home for unaccompanied minors for fourteen years. Lukkarila is currently a sixteen bed children's home. (Lukkarila Perheryhmäkoti.)

The children's home hosts children and young people, who have come to Finland as unaccompanied minors. At the time of arrival, the new residents are given information and an induction from the Lukkarila social worker. The social worker assists and supports the children as needed. (Lukkarila Perheryhmäkoti.)

The Lukkarila main building is the home for children and young people. It has space for ten children and young people. In addition, the building has office space for staff. The 17-18 year olds live in supported housing in the nearby apartment buildings. This separate housing unit provides support to young people in independent living skills.

Lukkarila has strong roots in multicultural work. Multiculturalism and the richness brought by different ethnic backgrounds are part of the everyday life in Lukkarila. The staff hold different positions in the areas of support work, planning and administration. The staffing levels confirm in quantity and quality with the child protection law. Social work, community teaching and health care are the most common educational backgrounds of staff. The staff consist of people of different ethnic backgrounds for the advancement of multiculturalism. (Lukkarila Perheryhmäkoti.)

This study concentrates on the role of counsellors (ohjaajat) working with unaccompanied minors in Lukkarila in laying a foundation for their integration.

### **3 Previous Research on this Topic**

This section discusses what existing literature and research say about this topic. Previous research stresses on the relevance of this topic. Topics related to the integration of immigrants in the media are very common nowadays. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "The integration of immigrants at the local level is a topic of significant interest for OECD countries." (OECD 2006, p.32). Finland is a member of the OECD therefore, this topic is relevant in Finland and is worth researching on.



Heikkilä et al (2011, p.12) support this view by stating that “the rise in the number of asylum seekers [and refugees] in recent years has been an issue in the Finnish public discussion”. There are also discussions about the need for immigrant labour to replace the rapid ageing Finnish population in the labour market in the coming decade (Heikkilä et al 2011, p.12). It is therefore important to start by laying a strong foundation for integration at the local level in order to effectively prepare this group of immigrants for the Finnish labour market and also as healthy, empowered and participating citizens in the Finnish society.

There is a great amount of literature and research about the integration of immigrants especially in the OECD countries and the European Union. Existing literature on this topic is mostly about the challenges and possibilities immigrants face during the integration process in a new country. There is also literature about integration policies both in Finland as well as other European countries. Previous research has mostly been carried out on the integration of immigrants and other established refugees. However, there is very little research about the integration of unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors are immigrants in a general sense and may face similar challenges as the rest of the immigrant population. However, they are a minority group of immigrants and according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) may face additional challenges with regard to integration that are specific to them because of their status.

Previous research also highlights the attitude of natives towards immigrants in general and refugees in particular. In most cases, the native population is seen to have a negative attitude towards refugees and asylum seekers. Hayes and Humphries (2006 p.11) mention how the U.K public is "bombarded" with negative images and stories which demonise asylum seekers and help natives to justify their unequal treatment. Heikkilä et al (2011, p.12) also talk about the negative attitudes that exist in Finland towards asylum seekers and refugees which is portrayed by the fact that municipalities are not always ready to establish reception centres and also recently the nationalist attitude and a critical view on immigration have gained popularity in the political scene.

There is also research on helping professionals working with immigrants. For example Ahde et al (2007) in their final thesis focus on tools to help professionals supporting immigrant integration. They created an informative folder which is aimed at helping professionals to have quick access to information. Podobinská and Torri (2011) also came up with integration cards as tools for instructors supporting the integration of immigrant

women. These are just a few examples of a wide range of existing literature aimed at supporting professionals working with immigrants.

## 4 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

As mentioned earlier, social pedagogy and the concepts of empowerment, participation and integration form the theoretical framework of this study. This is because social pedagogy as will be discussed subsequently, aims at integrating individuals and groups of people into the society, empowering them to be able to participate in their lives and in the community. These concepts are used as basis to study how counsellors can empower unaccompanied minors to participate fully in their lives, participate fully in the society in which they live thereby, laying the foundation for integration.

### 4.1 Integration

The integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the European Union (EU) and of course in Finland is and has been a hot topic in political discussions, media and also within the general population. According to the Act on the Integration of Immigrants and the Reception of Asylum Seekers, integration means the personal development of immigrants, aimed at enabling their participation and functioning in the society while preserving their language and culture. It also includes the measures taken and resources provided by authorities to promote Integration. (Laki maahanmuuttajien kotouttamisesta ja turvapaikanhakijoiden vastaanotosta.)

Heikkilä et al (2011, p. 18) define integration as a “dynamic two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of the member states.” Integration therefore requires the commitment of all parties involved in the integration process. That is, the commitment of the refugees themselves to adapt to the culture of their new community without losing their own cultural identity, and also the commitment of the native community and its policy makers to welcome refugees and create a conducive environment that response to the needs of a diverse population. (Heikkilä et al 2011, p. 18.)

This definition of integration was adopted by European Union member states at the First Ministerial Conference on Integration in Groningen in November 2004. This definition

serves as a guideline for countries in the European Union in adapting their old integration policies and also adopting integration policies that meet new realities of immigration. (Heikkilä et al 2011.)

There are three important elements in the above definition. The first element is that 'integration is a dynamic process'. This means that in order to support integration or lay a foundation for integration, a culturally diverse reality has to be adopted. This reality changes continuously and as a result should be continuously checked to identify elements that support and promote the engagement of the receiving society in accommodating immigrants.

Secondly, the definition states that 'Integration is a two-way process.' That is, integration is an interactive process involving both immigrants and the receiving community. Both immigrants and natives are responsible for creating an integrative environment in which both parties can live in harmony and share experiences and abilities equally.

The third element of the European Union's definition of integration is 'mutual accommodation' as the goal of integration. This means that both natives and immigrants are required to contribute to the never ending process of the creation of a society that is both diverse and open where people can be part of the community regardless of their differences. They also have to build a community where both groups can live in harmony.

Integration is understood as the situation in which settling persons can participate fully in the economic, social, cultural and political life of a society, while also being able to retain their own cultural identity (Valtonen 2009, p. 62). This definition places importance and value to the immigrants own culture and identity. It is important for immigrants to maintain their own cultural identity while adapting aspects of the new culture into it. These aspects of the new culture which immigrants integrate into their lives will contribute in enabling them to be able to participate fully in the economic, social, cultural and political life of a society.

Valtonen (2009, p.63) further mentions two dimensions of integration: cultural integration and structural integration. Cultural integration refers to the process of learning cultural ways of an ethnic group to which one does not belong, for example a Somali immigrant in Finland learning the cultural ways of Finns. On the other hand, the process of learning

the cultural ways of an ethnic group to which one does belong is referred to as socialisation. For example, a Somali learning the cultural ways of Somalis. Immigrants will eventually learn and adopt the cultural ways of the dominant culture to an extent. The dominant culture in the society will exert pressure on immigrants to adopt the norms, values and patterns of the majority. This process is referred to as acculturation. (Valtonen 2009, p. 63.)

Structural integration on the other hand refers to the process whereby, members of different ethnic groups participate in institutions in the society other than the ones of the ethnic community in which they were raised (Valtonen 2009). For example, Immigrants in Finland participating in secondary structural institutions such as economic, political, legal and educational institutions. It also includes participating in primary structural institutions such as private institutions or other institutions e.g. religious, social and recreational institutions.

#### 4.1.1 Integration of Asylum Seekers in Finland

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the terms asylum-seeker and refugee are often confused: “an asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated” (UNHCR). According to Turvapaikka ja Pakolaistilastot, 3,238 sought asylum in Finland in 2013.

People can apply for asylum in Finland if they are fearful of returning to their country and are in need of protection. People seeking protection from Finland must ask for asylum from border control authorities or the police upon arrival in Finland or as soon as possible thereafter. (Applying for Asylum.) After asking for asylum, asylum seekers are placed in a reception centre for the time it takes to process their application. The reception centre will provide accommodation and other reception-related services such as financial support and health care. (Reception Activities.)

The UNHCR (2007) recommends that asylum seekers should be included in the integration programs for refugees. This is because the UNHCR believes that reception policies are more effective if they are guided by long term outcomes of the process. If asylum seekers are included in the integration plan, the reception process will have far more

positive long term outcomes. For example, integration will be more effective subsequently when asylum seekers are recognised as refugees. On the other hand, if the asylum claims are unsuccessful, there can be sustainable return and reintegration of persons to their countries of origin. (UNHCR 2007.)

However, this is apparently not the case because unlike refugees, asylum seekers do not have an integration plan in Finland. According to the Finnish immigration service, adult asylum seekers may seek employment after living in Finland for three or six months depending on whether they have a passport (Right to Employment). However, employment is not a practical option for most asylum seekers because their employment opportunities are limited due to barriers such as language and other skills that may be needed for employment.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Labour in Finland (2003) states that “Asylum seeker reception centres seek to maintain the life management abilities of asylum seekers and thereby to prevent social exclusion and marginalisation. It is not the aim to integrate asylum seekers into the society.” I find this position contradictory because if the aim is not to integrate asylum seekers into the society, then that can create room for exclusion and marginalisation.

#### 4.1.2 Integration of Refugees in Finland

The UNHCR defines a refugee as a person recognised by EU Member States under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, as well as to persons who have entered EU Member States through UNHCR resettlement programs and to those who have been granted subsidiary protection. (UNHCR 2007).

According to Turvapaikka ja Pakolaistilastot, 747 refugees were resettled in Finland and 1,827 asylum seekers got a positive decision to reside in Finland. Therefore, Finland received a total of 2,574 refugees in 2013. (Turvapaikka ja Pakolaistilastot.)

In Finland, refugees are eligible for the same integration services as other legal immigrants. This is because many integration challenges faced by other immigrants living legally in Finland are similar to those faced by refugees. These challenges include for example language and cultural barriers, racism and other xenophobic attitudes.

The Integration Act in Finland contains provisions on measures to promote immigrant integration i.e. including refugees. It aims at promoting integration, equality and freedom of choice by providing the means through which immigrants can acquire basic skills and knowledge required in the society e.g. Finnish language studies, education, employment, cultural participation etc. The Act seeks to improve the economic and social life management of immigrants and support their participation in planning their lives, playing an active role in their integration and influencing the matters concerning them and the Finnish society in general. (Ministry of Labour Finland 2003.)

The Integration Act serves as a basis for integration programmes and individual integration plans in all municipalities in Finland. The local authority in collaboration with other institutions such as social welfare and labour and unemployment services are responsible for preparing the program and providing the means and cooperation through which information and skills required for integration will be achieved. Furthermore, the integration plan embodies an agreement between the local authority, employment office and the immigrant himself/herself on measures to support the immigrant in acquiring skills necessary for integration. Underage children are included in the integration plans of their parents and an individual plan is made when necessary for underage children who are already approaching adulthood. (Ministry of Labour Finland 2003.)

#### 4.1.3 Integration of Unaccompanied Minors in Finland

The term unaccompanied minors in this final thesis is used to refer to underage refugees who have come to Finland without their parents/guardians. According to article 2 (f) of Council Directive (2001):

unaccompanied minors means third-country nationals or stateless persons below the age of eighteen, who arrive on the territory of the Member States unaccompanied by an adult responsible for them whether by law or custom, and for as long as they are not effectively taken into the care of such a person, or minors who are left unaccompanied after they have entered the territory of the Member States. (Council Directive 2001).

Unaccompanied minors in Finland are placed in family group homes specifically meant for minors. As mentioned earlier, this final thesis has been carried out in collaboration

with Lukkarila which is one of the family group homes for unaccompanied minors in Finland.

According to Turvapaikka ja Pakolaistilastot, 167 unaccompanied minors came to Finland in 2012, 156 in 2013 and 120 between January and August of 2014.

According to the ministry of Labor In Finland, unaccompanied minors are entitled to attend the local preschool and comprehensive school. Having access to education is an important aspect in the structural and cultural integration of unaccompanied minors in Finland. Other ways in which the integration of unaccompanied minors can be supported at a local level by counsellors working with them will be discussed subsequently in this Final thesis.

## 4.2 Social Pedagogy

There are multiple meanings to the term “social pedagogy” and different contexts in which the term can be used. However this topic best suits Hämäläinen's (1999) view of social pedagogy from the social work perspective. He defines social pedagogy as an orientation of theory and practice towards the integration of individuals into the society through individualisation and socialisation. It consists of social action and practice. Supporting people's individual and social growth and empowering them to become independent members of the society as well as help them to be able to interact with their social environment. (Hämäläinen, 1999.)

According to Hämäläinen, Social pedagogy:

...concentrates on questions of the integration of the individual in society, both in theory and in practice. It aims to alleviate social exclusion. It deals with the processes of human growth that ties people to the systems, institutions and communities that are important to their well-being and life management. The idea of social pedagogy is to promote people's social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity and social competence as members of society. (Hämäläinen 2003, p. 76.)

According to Eriksson and Markstrom (2003), social pedagogy was created from three traditions; namely the continental tradition, the American tradition and the pedagogical tradition.

The continental tradition deals with the idea of continuous learning and the notion that human beings can only develop fully as part of a society. This tradition promotes freedom as opposed to restriction of individuals. It also promotes participation, inclusion and the strengthening of social interaction.

The American tradition is based on individualised casework and therapeutic approaches, That is, it is mostly centred on work with vulnerable groups of people and individuals in the society (social work). Its emphasis is on work with individuals, casework and providing care. Eriksson and Markstrom (2003) suggest that the goal of the American tradition is re-socialisation and integration.

The last but not the least is the pedagogical tradition. According to this tradition, people develop constantly and as a result, they are capable of changing their situation. (Eriksson and Markstrom 2003.)

All of these traditions can be necessary in one way or another in activating individuals and groups of people to be able to participate fully in their lives and in the matters that affect their lives. The traditions of social pedagogy can also help to empower individuals and groups of people in the society to be able to take control of their circumstances.

Hatton (2013) states that “social pedagogy should not just be seen as a technique but as a means of enhancing the lives of the people we work with.” Promoting integration and helping unaccompanied minors to be able to find their place in the society and become empowered both as individuals and members of the society and also to be able to participate fully in their lives and in the community is a means of enhancing their lives.

#### 4.3 Empowerment

The concept of empowerment means different things to different people. However, when talking about empowerment in the social field, we need a working definition to guide us. Empowerment can be defined as:

The means by which individuals, groups and/or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their own goals, the process of empowerment involves situations where people individually and collectively are able to



work towards helping themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives (Adams, 2003 p.8).

Naraya (2002) also defines empowerment as the expansion of freedom of choice and action. Empowerment means increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one's life. It involves expanding peoples assets and capabilities to participate in negotiating, influencing, controlling the things that affect their lives. (Naraya 2002.)

We can see from the above definitions that the focus is on 'people becoming able'. Each and every one of us has the ability to be empowered. We have the ability to be able to control our lives. Therefore, the role of counsellors working with unaccompanied minors can be aimed at enhancing the ability of these minors who may have come from high-risk backgrounds to be able to take control of their lives and their circumstances.

Adams (2003, p.60) states that workers need to develop empowering ways to work with individuals. This is because before a group is empowered, individual members of the group have to first of all be empowered. (Adams, 2003, p.60.) For example, in the case of unaccompanied minors, counsellors working with them have to work in ways that facilitate, enable and support individual empowerment because unaccompanied minors need to first of all feel empowered as individuals before they can feel empowered as a group. According to Adams (2003, p. 60), there are two dimensions to empowering work. These include the authoritative and the facilitative dimensions.

#### 4.3.1 Authoritative

The authoritative form of empowering work is not the primary or predominant form of empowerment. However, it is relevant in empowering work depending on whether the authoritative activities or actions carried out by workers actually improve the situation of service users (Adams, 2003, p.60). In the case of counsellors working with unaccompanied minors, the question is whether the authoritative activities or actions by counsellors improve the situation of the minors.

Adams (2003) mentions that the authoritative form of empowering work has three techniques to it. These include: the prescriptive, informative, and confronting techniques.

The prescriptive technique of empowering work aims at directing the behaviour of clients. It can be practiced in situations whereby, the worker needs to apply the law to control or direct the client or service user. The worker can apply the law in this case to clarify the client about his/her rights and obligations thereby, empowering the client to act accordingly. (Adams, 2003, p. 62.)

The informative technique aims at providing information and knowledge to clients and also creating a space for dialogue about how useful the information or knowledge gained is or might be to clients. Information and knowledge can be very empowering for the clients. For example, if unaccompanied minors are given information about services, they may then feel empowered to access these services themselves or access their needs themselves and choose which of the services available will be useful to them.

The confronting technique aims at raising awareness of clients about limiting attitude or behaviour. This may include behaviour or attitude that goes against the law, rules and regulations. For example, if unaccompanied minors behave in a way that goes against the law, it may be necessary for counsellors to use this technique in which the worker exercises authority. However, the prescriptive and informative techniques both aim at empowering the clients and limit or avoid confronting situations. (Adams 2003.)

#### 4.3.2 Facilitative

The second dimension of empowering work is the Facilitative dimension. Facilitative activities have more empowering potential than authoritative activities as they aim at building client's self-confidence and promoting their status as citizens. There are four techniques of facilitative empowering work. These include Cathartic, Catalytic, supportive and advocacy. (Adams 2003.)

The cathartic aims at enabling clients to be able to talk through their emotions. For example pain, grief, anger etc. The Catalytic aims at enabling clients to discover themselves, learn to direct their lives, solve possible problems etc. These processes have to be directed by the client in order to be empowering. The third technique is the supportive

and aims at affirming the worth and value of clients. For example counsellors working with unaccompanied minors can be supportive in building the children's self-worth, self-image, abilities etc. in an empowering way through activities which they carry out with the children and also through dialogue, use of language etc. Last but not the least is advocacy which includes different activities and persons. Advocacy can be individual, self-advocacy, citizen advocacy, professional advocacy and collective advocacy for change affecting a group of people. Counsellors working with unaccompanied minors can advocate for their clients and they can also empower clients to advocate for themselves. (Adams 2003, p. 60–64.)

#### 4.4 Participation

The definition of the concept of participation varies depending on the context in which it is used. A general definition of participation according to the Oxford Dictionary is “the action of taking part in something.” According to Tufte, Mefalopus and Paolo (2009, p. 4), participation in some contexts is defined as “the mobilization of people to eliminate unjust hierarchies of knowledge, power and economic distribution.” Participation in another context is defined as “the reach and inclusion of inputs by relevant groups in the design and implementation of a development project.” The first definition represents the “social movement” approach to participation. The former context represents the “project-based” approach to participation. The social movement approach uses participation to achieve a pre-established goal while the project-based approach uses participation as an empowering process with the aim of enhancing the capability/ability of people (individuals and groups) and empowering them to take control and direct their own lives. However, both share a common understanding of the concept of participation as the involvement of ordinary people in the development or empowering process leading to change. (Tufte, Mefalopus and Paolo 2009, p. 4.)

Furthermore, according to Tufte, Mefalopus and Paolo (2009 p. 5), the following outcomes are attained when people participate in the empowering process; Psycho-social outcomes of increased feelings of ownership of a problem and a commitment to do something about it, improvement of competences and capacities required to engage with the defined development problem and actual influence on institutions that can affect an individual or the community.

Participation refers to the situation where people are continually involved, play an active part and have greater choice, exercise power and contribute to the decision making and management of the things affecting them (Adams, 2008 p.31). There are two main models of participation. These include; the consumerist model where the service user is seen only as a consumer who is able to participate in the decision making of services or goods provided based on his choices of the services or goods he consumes. The other model is the democratic model which sees service users as equal citizens with other members of the general public and through participation are able to gain control over their lives and are also able to contribute to the development of their society and services (Adams 2008, p.35.) The democratic model is what integration is about. Unaccompanied minors should be able to socialise with the native population. They should be able to acquire information and skills that will enable them to better access information/services which will give them ability to make informed choices and give them the freedom to choose.

From the above definitions, we can describe the concept of participation as the involvement of persons or group of persons in situations or actions that improve their lives and wellbeing. For example, improving their income, security, self-esteem, skills, competences etc.

The concepts of participation and empowerment work hand in hand. Adams (2008 p. 29) mentions that more often than not, people need to be empowered in order for them to be able to participate in their lives and in the society and on the other hand, some people need to be able to participate in their lives and in their communities in order for them to be empowered. Tufte, Mefalopus and Paolo (2009) support this view by stating that “the fundamental aim of empowering people to handle challenges and influence the direction of their own lives is inherent in participation.”

Through these concepts (empowerment and participation), excluded individuals may learn to take responsibility of their lives and their society at large. Individuals can live in harmony with the values and norms of the society in which they live. The theory of social pedagogy guides workers/counsellors on how to improve the quality of people’s lives by supporting growth, supporting participation, empowering individuals and communities and preventing social problems. (Hämäläinen 1999.)

## 5 Objectives

This section explains why this study was carried out. As mentioned earlier, asylum seekers face more challenges in the integration process and are vulnerable to social problems such as exclusion, discrimination, marginalisation, racism etc. These conditions are not favourable for integration and in addition to these conditions, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has also observed that the long stay of people in reception centres and group homes has a huge effect on their attitude and may create conditions which may not be favourable for integration. This is because long stays at reception centres and group homes may create uncertainty, exclusion, mental health problems etc. Uncertainty takes away any motivation they may have had in the beginning thus creating a hostile environment for future integration (UNHCR 2007, P. 6.)

During my second work placement at the City of Helsinki, Department of Social Services and Health Care- Unit for Immigrant Services, I observed that most of the refugees who were starting their integration plan at the time had no basic knowledge of the Finnish language, the service system and even no knowledge of the culture of the society in which they live. This experience at the Unit for Immigrant Services got me thinking about the importance of having a good foundation for integration which clients can continue building on.

Furthermore, after discussing with my working life partner about my interest in carrying out a study on integration, they expressed that they would like for me to put together concrete ways in which they can support the integration of the children they work with. Hence the reason why I carried out this study.

My research question is: How can counsellors support unaccompanied minors in laying a foundation for integration?

The purpose of my research is to identify the role of counsellors working with unaccompanied minors in laying the foundation for integration during this period of long stays at the family group home. I also believe that in order for effective integration to continue after minors move out from the group homes, they have to already have a strong foundation for integration.

This final thesis looks into existing ways of supporting early integration of unaccompanied minors as well as possible ways to support early integration from the point of view of counsellors working with these minors. The aim of this study is to put together concrete ways in which counsellors can effectively lay the foundation for integration. The results and conclusions of this study have been used to make a guide which counsellors can use to guide them in supporting unaccompanied minors in laying a foundation for integration.

I anticipate that this study will benefit counsellors working with unaccompanied minors as well as other counsellors working with other immigrant groups. It will also benefit students who intend to work with unaccompanied minors and other immigrants upon their graduation by helping them learn the basic things that they can do to support integration at a local level and the competences they will need to acquire during their studies to be able to effectively and successfully work with unaccompanied minors and other immigrant groups towards effective integration.

Furthermore, this study will benefit clients as well. This is because I anticipate that if unaccompanied minors are able to have a strong foundation for integration during their stay at the family group home, they will have a better chance of effective integration later on when they move out of the group home. They will be able to form positive attitudes towards integration and some social problems such as exclusion, discrimination, marginalisation, racism etc. can be minimised. Their participation in their lives and in their communities will be enhanced. This will lead to self-empowerment, self-worth and equality with the native population and integration and participation in general will be promoted.

The community can also benefit subsequently from this study. If the early integration of unaccompanied minors and other refugees is supported effectively, most social problems involving this immigrant group will be prevented and effective integration will be promoted. Therefore, unaccompanied minors and other refugees as well will be healthy, motivated and activated enough to fully commit to the integration process and be active citizens that participate and contribute to the welfare of the society as a whole.

## 6 Methodology

Qualitative research method was used to gather the data for this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as an important approach in research methodology that implies an in-depth understanding and the reasons behind the behaviour.

Some characteristics of qualitative research are as follows: qualitative research seeks to answer a question and uses a predefined set of procedures to answer the question. It produces findings that can be applicable beyond the setting of the research or study. The focus of qualitative research is on smaller and focused samples as opposed to larger and random samples. Qualitative research seeks to answer the research question from the perspective of the focused sample population where the study is based. More time is usually spent exploring the topic with participants due to the small quantity of the participants as oppose to quantitative research. Research is most often carried out in a natural setting such as a place of work or organisation that the participants are familiar with. (Malcolm 2009.)

The method used to collect qualitative data for this study is interviewing. Counsellors were interviewed to get a clear view of their role in laying the foundation for integration. It is worth mentioning that the interviews were conducted using the English language which is not the native language of the interviewees. However, all interviewees could express themselves fluently in English. According to Malcolm (2009 p.111-112), interviews are a popular means of collecting qualitative data because it is cheap, convenient and highly effective in collecting extensive data in a short period of time. Interviews are very effective in collecting data relating to personal experience, emotions, work experience etc.

The format of the interviews was semi-structured and this format was used because I thought more information will be acquired through semi structured interviews than through structured interviews or questionnaires. Malcolm mentions that with semi structured interviews, both pre-planned and unplanned questions can be used. Unplanned questions maybe for example questions that the interviewer may ask based on the participants answer (Malcolm 2009 p.113). One counsellor was interviewed at a time because it was easier to manage rather than interviewing a group of counsellors at the same time.

In order to analyse the data, I went through the interviews and picked out key themes that are related to the aims, objectives and theory of this study. Then, I summed up some practical ways in which counsellors can help unaccompanied minors at the local level lay a foundation for integration.

## **7 Implementation**

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences requires that the final thesis be implemented in collaboration with a working life partner. As stated earlier, this study has been carried out in collaboration with Lukkarila. This section explains how this study was carried out. That is, it discusses the social counsellors' interview, results and also point out the grounds for the reliability and validity of this study. Some aspects that may contribute to questioning the credibility of this study are also explored from a critical point of view.

### **7.1 Social Counsellors Interview**

This study was conducted using semi-structured theme interviews. Semi-structured interview is a common method of research in the field of social sciences. The themes of the interview are typically focused on specific topics which are explored further by open-ended questions, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored. These are drawn from the phenomenal categories. The study question helps define these categories, themes and finally questions which the interviewer or researcher uses to obtain data for their study. The data gained through theme interview is profound and can be conducted for a small sample. (Hirsijärvi and Hurme 1995.)

This topic and the purpose for this study was discussed with the manager of Lukkarila at the beginning of this study. The theory of social pedagogy and the concepts of empowerment, participation and integration were also chosen as the framework for this study. The interview questions were formed based on themes in relation to the theory/concepts. The themes include: activities supporting participation and integration at a local level, empowerment at work (authoritative/facilitative), attitudes, competences and role of



counsellors. These themed questions helped me to acquire data which focused on the theory and answer the research question effectively. (See appendix 1 and 2).

Three professionals working at Lukkarila with three to sixteen years of working experience with unaccompanied minors were interviewed to collect the data for this study. According to Guest et al (2006), the number of interviewees needed for a study can be determined when data collection has reached “saturation”. Data saturation occurs at the stage where interviews no longer yield new information or themes. I realised that my collection of data had reached “saturation” after the third interview because the information was reoccurring in all three interviews.

The interviewees were chosen randomly based on those who were working on the days that I was available to carry out the interviews. The interviews were carried out at the family group home in the counsellors’ office area. All of the interviews were carried out using the English Language and were all recorded. The recorded interviews lasted an average of twenty to thirty minutes each. Overall, the interview atmosphere was very relaxed and both interviewees and interviewer felt comfortable in participating in the interviews. I was happy with the interview process and the data acquired for this study through the interviews.

## 7.2 Themed Interview Results

I followed the steps of thematic data analysis as cited by Blaxter (2010 pg. 233) to attain the result of this study. Firstly the interviews were carried out, next the interviews were transcribed from the recordings in order to effectively theme the content. Then, the transcribed interviews were further coded into themes. The themes were created based on the theories and concepts used in this study. This was done simply by going through the data, extracting significant and relevant information and grouping them into themes in relation to theories to create evidence about the content that explains how counsellors support the integration of unaccompanied minors. This led to the development of obtained data into the results of this study. The results were then summed up to draw the conclusions of this study.

The results focuses on the subjective perceptions of the counsellors interviewed without making judgments about the validity of their opinions and point of views. The interviewees have been named interviewee A, B and C for the purpose of this study.

### 7.2.1 Activities Supporting Participation and Integration at a Local Level

According to my interviewees, there are different activities that support the integration of unaccompanied minors at a local level. There is a Non-Governmental Organization called Settlementti Joensuu (Joensuu Settlement Association) which has an agency known as Tyttöjen Tupa. This organisation provides 'big sister' services amongst others for the girls in Lukkarila. The big sister service is a professionally supervised volunteer activity. It requires that the big sister is over 18 years old and has the resources to act as a younger girls (6-16years old) trustworthy big sister.

... There is a company called tyttöjen tupa and our girls go there and they have their own iso sisko (big sister) and the iso sisko takes a child from lukkarila and they go out and do something together... (Interviewee A).

... Some of the children have their own big sister and they can go to the movies, swimming, shopping and other activities in Joensuu together. They also have friend families and some spend weekends with the friend family. (Interviewee B.)

The Finnish Family friend is also a program that Lukkarila uses to connect unaccompanied minors to Finnish Families. The children with family friends can spend weekends, holidays and other free time with their Finnish family and experience Finnish family life. These services are recommended to the girls by the counsellors and they can voluntarily choose if they would like to have their own "big sister" or "family". "The big sister" and "family friend" programs all help to promote the involvement of minors with the local community hence supporting participation.

Some of the children here have Finnish family friends and I think that these families help a great deal in bringing the children on a very personal level in contact with the Finnish culture and Finnish habits. They get to experience Finnish family life at some level and they also speak Finnish with them which helps develop their Finnish skills. (Interviewee B)

Another activity that support the Integration of unaccompanied minors at a local level according to my interviewees is hobbies. The counsellors at Lukkarila explained that all of the children have hobbies and they believe that these hobbies facilitate their Interaction with Finnish children and help tremendously in developing the children's Finnish

language skills. The activities they engage in such as football, skating etc. engages unaccompanied minors in positive developmental activities that support their adaptation, integration and participation.

...the children take part in their hobbies. Jalkapallo (football) is very popular here. The team is made up of Finnish guys and the trainer so they learn Finnish and the Finnish way of doing many things through their hobbies. (Interviewee A.)

...They also choose themselves their hobbies and interests and some of them have made good friends from their hobbies... (Interviewee B).

...we have activities here and we try to find some nice hobby for every child living here. Football is one and the children are here nowadays for such long periods of time, they get to have other hobbies too like dancing skating. The children participate in deciding what kind of hobby they will like to have and the adult then try to find the places where they can practice what they like doing. (Interviewee C.)

Furthermore attending school is a very important aspect that supports the children's integration and participation in the community. According to the counsellors, attending school helps the children to live a 'normal' life because it creates routine which they have to follow each day. The education they receive at school, contributes to their intellectual and psychological development which is necessary for their involvement/participation in their lives and in the community. Acquiring an education is very important in the integration of children in the society because the school creates an environment where the children can socialise, make friends and learn the Finnish language amongst other things.

...In Lukkarila the rules are very simple. Every child must go to school...they go to school. That is the most important thing. Every child has a place in the school... (Interviewee A.)

...They are going to school and first they have their own classes that is the MAMU class then they get integrated into the Finnish classes... I think (this) play a key role in helping our children integrate in the community. (Interviewee C.)

### 7.2.2 Empowerment at Work. Authoritative/ Facilitative

As discussed earlier, both the authoritative and facilitative approach of empowerment are used in work with unaccompanied minors at Lukkarila. The prescriptive and informative techniques of the authoritative form of empowerment are used by counsellors at Lukkarila. The counsellors tell the children about the rules they have to follow and the

consequences of not living by the rules. They also give them information about different services available like the 'big sister' services discussed above and also information about hobbies etc. The children are then empowered to choose their behaviour according to the rules and they have the power to decide what kind of hobbies or other activities they will like to participate in. The confronting technique is also used by counsellors when the children disobey the rules.

In Lukkarila the rules are very simple. Every child must go to school... If they don't go to school then they cannot go to hobbies another rule is that we do not accept any violence here. We can talk and sometime we can talk very loudly but we don't fight here. Everyone has to understand that. Of course sometimes we are human and they are very young so we try to talk and talk and talk about these rules. (Interviewee A.)

... I also give them information about services and about the rules, I tell them what they can do and cannot do, what is acceptable and not acceptable. (Interviewee B.)

Furthermore, the facilitative approach of empowerment is also used by counsellors at Lukkarila. The children can discuss freely with the counsellors about their feelings and the counsellors support them in dealing with their emotions. Below are some quotations from the counsellors illustrating how they make use of the facilitative approach of empowerment work at Lukkarila. The facilitative approach can enable clients to discover themselves, build their self-esteem and learn to direct their own lives.

Yes I try to encourage their own growth every day. I give them compliments when they are good in something. If I help with their homework I don't give them answers I try to help them in a way that they can do it themselves. I don't do the homework. They do it but I am there to clarify if they don't understand something. (Interviewee B.)

They have home meetings where the children can give their opinions about things going on in the house. The older children are also free to go where they want to go they just have to inform the adults about it. So if they want to go visit a friend they can go. (Interviewee B.)

I remind them that their own cultural identity is very important. We encourage them to have relationships with other members of the community who share similar cultural backgrounds with some of our children. (Interviewee C.)

.... When they make food, they can do what they want. Of course I am watching what they are doing (supervising)... (Interviewee A.)

... We try to find their hobbies according to their interests from Joensuu or Kontiolahti area. We go there first together, if it is ok then they start going on their own... (Interviewee A.)

### 7.2.3 Competences of Counsellors Working with Unaccompanied Minors

Counsellors are supposed to have certain qualities, skills, knowledge and qualifications to be able to work with unaccompanied minors. Below are some quotations from the interviewees on competences required for counsellors working with unaccompanied minors.

... You must understand young people, you must have empathy, you must be tasapuolinen (unbiased). You must understand the different developmental stages and understand that eight years olds are in a different developmental stage from 15 years old and then work with them according to their level of development... So we must show them that we really care... (Interviewee A.)

...it is very important to be open minded...and not expect everyone to be the same. They have to learn and adopt some Finnish ways but they do not have to become entirely Finnish because they have to also preserve their own identity so be open minded. (Interviewee B.)

You have to have a big heart...of course it is important to have skills in communication and dialogue. Everyday life skills such as cooking cleaning organizing are also important because the counselors are responsible for these things here. (Interviewee C.)

We learn from this study that counsellors working with unaccompanied minors have to obtain skills in problem solving, time management, organising, cross cultural communication etc.

### 7.2.4 Attitudes towards Integration

According to the counsellors, both the children at Lukkarila and the members of the local community have quite positive attitudes towards integration. Below are some quotations from the counsellors about attitudes towards integration.

I think it is (the attitude of the children) more positive than negative because nowadays the situation is very different than earlier in this area. Now they have so many Finnish friends here so it has helped them to integrate to society... (Interviewee A.)

I think they have quite positive attitudes. They all go to school every day, they all have hobbies and Finnish friends and so on... (Interviewee B.)

...I have not experienced a situation where the child do not want to integrate. We do not really have to push them. (Interviewee B.)

...They go to school and hobbies without complaining and they have Finnish friends and some have Finnish friend families. (Interviewee C.)

Furthermore, according to my interviewees, members of the Kontiolahti and Paihola community also have a receptive attitude towards the children of Lukkarila especially after getting to know a little bit about the children's backgrounds. Below are some quotations from the counsellors about the attitude of members of the community.

... Is very positive I think so. Of course there are people who say 'what are these people doing here' or some other stupid things but normally if I start to tell them why they are here then they are like 'oh I see' they do not know our children's backgrounds they think they are here with their parents but they are here without their parents. I think the children would have preferred to stay with their parents and families but they had to come here. So when many people understand this then they show more empathy. (Interviewee A.)

We have refugees in the Kontiolahti municipality for a long time now and I think people have become used to them and the fact that they come from different cultures and look different. They have been some negative atmosphere but I think the members of the community are more acceptive towards younger refugees like our children... (Interviewee B.)

Well I think that this place has been here for over fifteen years and this is a small village ... The asylum seekers are part of the community. (Interviewee C.)

### 7.3 Validity and Ethics

According to Denscombe (2010), the validity of a study always needs to be demonstrated as part of the research process. That is, researchers have to be able to demonstrate that their data is accurate and appropriate. Denscombe (2010) discusses four aspects linked to the validity of a qualitative study. These include: Credibility (validity), dependability (reliability), transferability (generalizability) and Confirmability (objectivity). It is therefore important for me to discuss the validity of this study. (Denscombe 2010.)

In order for research to be ethically acceptable and reliable and for its results to be credible, the research must be conducted according to the responsible conduct of research. Applying the guidelines for the responsible conduct of research within the research community constitutes a form of self-regulation that is bound by legislation. (The Responsible Conduct of Research.)

According to the aforementioned guidelines, ethical principles of research in the humanities and social and behavioural sciences are divided into three areas. These include: Respecting the autonomy of research subjects, avoiding harm and privacy and data protection. (Ethical Principles.)

I followed the guidelines on responsible conduct of research (RCR) provided by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. The aim of the guidelines is to promote responsible conduct and integrity of research. It applies to all academic disciplines in Finland. (Responsible Conduct of Research and Procedures for Handling Allegations of Misconduct in Finland-RCR Guidelines.)

The first principle discussed is voluntary participation “Participation in research should be voluntary and based on informed consent” (Ethical Principles). First and foremost, the counsellors who were involved in this study did so based on their freewill and informed consent. We had discussions well in advance about the purpose of this study, anticipated consequences, how data acquired will be used and the degree of anonymity and confidentiality that they will have in the process of this study. This was done so that the counsellors will participate based on informed consent. The counsellors were not forced or obligated to participate in anyway.

Another principle put forward by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity is about privacy and data protection. According to the board, “The protection of privacy is a right protected by the Constitution of Finland. It is also an established and important principle in research ethics.” (Ethical Principles). This ethical principle was considered in safeguarding the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants in this study. The names, sex and age of the counsellors are not mentioned in this study. This was explained to them in advanced and by doing so, increased the chances of receiving honest answers from the counsellors which enabled the acquisition of valid data and valid results and conclusions.

The atmosphere in which the interviews were carried out was open and non-judgmental. We had a relationship based on respect and trust and the data acquired was analysed open-mindedly without placing judgments on the points of view of the interviewees.

Storing and destroying research data is another principle discussed in the aforementioned guidelines. How and for how long data will be stored and destroyed (deleted) after this study was discussed with the interviewees. They were also informed about where this thesis will be available/ published. We had a close and open collaboration throughout the process of this final thesis.

On the other hand, there are also some ambiguous aspects related to the reliability of this study. Firstly, the interviews were conducted in English which is not the native language of the interviewees. The fact that English is not the language that they felt most comfortable using could raise questions about the content, context and the interpretation of data. However, the interviewees could express themselves pretty well in English and we could communicate smoothly without interruptions due to language barrier.

This was my first research and it could be argued that my lack of experience in carrying out a research of this magnitude can raise questions about the validity of this study. Lack of experience could affect amongst others the way interview questions were asked and the way data was interpreted.

Another issue concerning the validity of this study is the number of counsellors interviewed. Three counsellors working with unaccompanied minors were interviewed. This means that the data might be less representative. That is, despite the fact that a detailed in-depth study of a small number of counsellors was carried out, their perceptions on laying the foundation for integration cannot be generalised.

Generally, this study is trustworthy and reliable because information is provided enabling others (readers) to check reliability. This is done by describing the implementation of each stage of this study process and also by using direct quotations from the interviews. This in my opinion, enhances greatly the reliability of this study.



## 8 Conclusions

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed at putting together concrete ways in which counsellors can effectively lay the foundation for integration of unaccompanied minors. Hence, this chapter, discusses my findings on how counsellors can support unaccompanied minors in laying a foundation for integration. This study puts together seven main factors that can help support the integration of unaccompanied minors and the role of counsellors within these factors. These factors include: Education, Finnish Language, Multi Agency Cooperation, Volunteers and NGO's, Local Community, Hobbies and Local Authorities.

It is worth mentioning that the seven factors put together by this study and the guideline for the role of counsellors within these factors in supporting the integration of unaccompanied minors came about as a result of data collected through interviews with the counsellors at Lukkarila. However, the final interpretation of the information acquired through the interviews are based on my perspective.

The aforementioned factors have further been summarised into a guide which counsellors can easily access and use as guidance in supporting unaccompanied minors integration. (See appendix 3).

### 8.1 Education

Attending school and acquiring an education is very important in supporting the social, cultural and eventually the economic lives of unaccompanied minors and also facilitating their social, cultural and economic participation in the society. Education provides routine and normalcy in the lives of unaccompanied minors and is a key tool in supporting their intellectual, social and psychological development. The children can acquire many life skills through education that are necessary in laying a strong foundation for integration.

However, the educational experience of unaccompanied minors also has the potential of placing them at risk of many other social problems. Refugee children like all other children are at risk of being bullied at school. Problems such as: language barrier, lack of parental/family support, identity issues, problems adjusting to the school system and new

life situation, different cultural values, emotional, psychological and other health problems amongst others make unaccompanied minors vulnerable to bullying, harassment, racism, exclusion etc. and may create conditions that are unfavourable for integration.

#### 8.1.1 Role of Counsellors

It is important for counsellors to cooperate with teachers and the school in supporting the children's integration. Counsellors should be aware of unaccompanied minor's vulnerability and develop a partnership with the children's teachers in alleviating and preventing the above mentioned problems. This can be done by meeting regularly with the teachers and discussing any concerns and possible measures for support. Counsellors have to know who is responsible for what at the school and not hesitate to contact them about any issues in relation to the children that may need their expertise.

Counsellors should demonstrate a positive attitude towards education to the children. This can be done by having discussions and talking positively about school and acting as role models to the children. Talking about the counsellors positive school experiences can help them to develop positive attitudes toward school and learning. They should discuss the importance of education some of which are mentioned above with the children.

Supporting unaccompanied minors academically is also vital. Counsellors can do this by helping children with their homework, providing an environment that is suitable for study, establishing a regular time for homework, and removing distractions such as television, games etc. during homework/study time. Counsellors have to find out how the children are doing at school as individuals and apply for special services if needed and also find out programs that the school offers for example after school activities and evaluate if they will be beneficial for the children.

Furthermore, it is also important for counsellors to encourage the children they work with. This can be done by showing interest in the children's education, listening actively when they talk about their day/experiences at school and praising/encouraging them when necessary. This can show them that someone cares and can make them enthusiastic and lead them to understand that learning can be enjoyable as well as rewarding and is

well worth the effort required. It can also help to build confidence in themselves as learners. Counsellors should encourage children to read, use the library and participate in activities that support learning.

Offering emotional and social support is another important role that counsellors can play in supporting unaccompanied minors education. Counsellors can do this by creating opportunities at the group home where the children can socialise with classmates and schoolmates out of the school environment. I think this has the potential of helping the children at the group home to build relationships and create friendships with other children in the community.

It is also important for counsellors to encourage the children to talk about both positive and negative experiences at school. This is because learning is greatly influenced by how a child feels about him/herself and the people around her, and vice versa. Creating opportunities where the children can freely discuss their feelings and experiences about school will allow counsellors to be able to give adequate support and contact other professionals for any other support needed.

## 8.2 Learning the Finnish Language

Learning the Finnish language is a very important factor in laying the foundation for integration. This is because when young people learn the language, their independence is supported, they participate more in the local community because they can make friends and communicate with natives, their self-worth and confidence is increased and their needs are better met because they are able to communicate with the counsellors directly. Unaccompanied minors have the opportunity to learn the Finnish Language at school. However, there are things that counsellors working with them can do to support them in learning the Finnish language.

### 8.2.1 Role of Counsellors

Counsellors can help the children to practice using the Finnish language through everyday communication at the group home. They can also find events and activities going on in the community where the children can hear and use the Finnish language with other

native speakers in the community. This can help them develop a personal connection to the language, improve their language skills and also help them to become confident in using the Finnish language outside the family group home.

Counsellors can also support children by having a positive attitude towards learning a second language, stressing the importance of learning the language and encouraging and supporting them just as with their education (above) throughout the process.

Counsellors can also act as advocates for the children in the school and community by giving proposals for services at the school and community that can support the needs of the children as a group as well as individuals in learning the Finnish language.

### 8.3 Multi Agency/Profession Cooperation

A variety of different people and organisations are responsible in laying the foundation for integration of immigrants including unaccompanied minors at different levels. This is because unaccompanied minors face a variety of challenges in a new country and their presence affect a variety of people and organisations. Hence a variety of people and organisations have to be involved in effectively supporting their integration. Examples of stakeholders involve include: governments, municipalities, non-governmental organisations (NGO's), health services, education services, members of the community and unaccompanied minors themselves. Counsellors are a good example of professionals who can support the integration of this group of immigrants (unaccompanied minors) at the local level.

#### 8.3.1 Role of Counsellors

Counsellors working with unaccompanied minors are very involved in their everyday life. As a result, they have a better understanding of the everyday challenges and possibilities of unaccompanied minors both as a group and as individuals and can contribute a great deal in laying the foundation for their integration. However, their cooperation with other professionals, organisations etc. involved in working with unaccompanied minors is vital in effectively supporting the children's overall wellbeing, development and integration.

Counsellors should be willing and committed to work collaboratively with other organisations and professionals and they should have a knowledge about organisations and services that could benefit the children, recommend and refer appropriate services to meet the needs of the children.

Counsellors should actively organise meetings or other means of information sharing with other professionals involved with the children such as teachers, trainers etc. to discuss the children's progress, areas of support and which organisation/service can best provide support needed.

Counsellors should have or acquire effective team work skills for example, ability to communicate effectively across disciplines, ability to tolerate different perspectives, ability to understand the roles of other agencies and professionals.

#### 8.4 Volunteers and Non-Governmental Organisations

Volunteers and NGO's can also help lay a foundation for integration. This can be done by volunteering for example as a friend of an unaccompanied minor and engaging in leisure activities together with minors. Volunteers and NGO's can also help with hobbies and in running peer support groups. Unaccompanied minors are most often without social networks upon arriving in a new country. This is because they have come to Finland leaving behind their relatives, friends, neighbours etc. Volunteers can be useful in creating new social networks and bringing refugees in close contact with the Finnish culture. A new culture can be hard to understand even for grownups. Therefore, volunteers can support unaccompanied minors in understanding the new culture and practice using the Finnish language. Volunteers can also help the children to find summer jobs for example berry picking in the summer. Having some working experience at a younger age in addition to all the other things discussed in this paragraph may help lay a foundation for integration which can improve the children's chances of successful integration later in life.

##### 8.4.1 Role of Counsellors

Counsellors should create opportunities and incentives for volunteers to participate in laying the foundation for integration. They should give information to organisations coordinating or involved in volunteer work as well as give information to unaccompanied minors about these organisations and what they do.

They should understand the economic and social value volunteers bring to the community and encourage authorities to make policies that support volunteer work with unaccompanied minors.

## 8.5 The Local Community

The local community plays a very important role in laying the foundation for integration. Positive and receptive attitudes from members of the community towards refugees can create a favourable environment for integration and vice versa. However, it is quite common that most steps taken to support unaccompanied minors integration do not often involve the local community. The presence of refugees in the local community can cause the natives to feel threatened by an increasing number of refugee children in the local community that may look different, talk different and behave differently. Some members of the community identify refugees as problems and the situation they are involved in as 'problematic'. This stigmatises refugees and may cause racism and xenophobia which can affect in one way or another both the refugees' enthusiasm to integrate and the communities' willingness to accommodate hence affecting negatively the "two way process" of integration.

Members of the same cultural background as the minors also form part of the local community. It is very important for counsellors to help connect unaccompanied minors to other members of the local community that share the same cultural background with the children. This is because integration according to the Act on Integration as mentioned earlier, means acquiring skills that will enable the participation and functioning of immigrants in the society while preserving their own language, culture and identity.

### 8.5.1 Role of Counsellors

Counsellors can contribute to creating positive interactions by acting as a bridge between unaccompanied minors and the local community and also raising awareness in the local community about unaccompanied minors, where they come from and how the members of the community can support them.

Counsellors who are trained in cross cultural communication could play a vital role in reducing or eliminating xenophobia and increasing mutual understanding between natives and the children. This can be done by organising events where both groups can participate hence facilitating interaction between cultures and breaking down cultural barriers.

Counsellors should provide opportunities where minors can practice their own culture, celebrate their own cultural events, cook their own native foods and provide information on cultural events in the community which minors can relate to. They could also help them find friends in the community from the same cultural background.

## 8.6 Hobbies

Hobbies also play a role in supporting the integration of unaccompanied minors. Engaging in hobbies and other after school/leisure activities provide the children with opportunities for developing and engaging in learning beyond basic skills. It also fosters their curiosity in learning new things about their new community and ultimately engaging them more in the process of learning. Furthermore, Hobbies can allow unaccompanied minors to keep busy, develop skills, participate in activities and lower the threshold for their interaction with other children in the community and foster constructive relationships with them around shared interests.

### 8.6.1 Role of Counsellors

Counsellors should find out about the children's interests and find them hobbies according to their interests. Counsellors should also inform the children about other sports and activities that the children may not be aware of and find out if they would be interested in trying out new activities.

Counsellors should be responsible in making sure that the children attend training and offer support when necessary. Counsellors should check in with the children's trainers to discuss their progress, areas of support and how support will be provided.

## 8.7 Local Authorities

Local authorities also play a vital role in supporting integration. This is because they hold positions and in most cases have the power to tackle a wide variety of issues which can directly or indirectly act as barriers to integration. They also have the authority to make provisions and policies that support integration.

### 8.7.1 Role of Counsellors

Counsellors have to advocate for the children they work with to the local authorities. They can do this by identifying the children's needs and providing data to support their claim to the local authorities so that the authorities will be convinced and see the benefits of the provision of services that will support the children's wellbeing and integration.

## 8.8 Conclusions in Relation to Theory

As mentioned earlier, this final thesis is based on the theory of social pedagogy and the concepts of empowerment, participation and integration. The interview themes and questions were planned based on these theories and as a result, the conclusions reflect the theory and concepts used.

All of the seven factors brought forth by this study and the role of counsellors reflect Hämäläinen's view on social pedagogy. These factors aim towards the integration of individuals into the community through social action and practice. The role of counsellors within all seven factors is to support the individual/social growth of the children they work with so that they may become independent and functional members of the community. According to Hämäläinen (2003), social pedagogy links people to systems, institutions (NGO's, schools, health care services and other agencies involved in working with un-accompanied minors) and communities (the Kontiolahti community in which Lukkarila is situated, the Finnish community and other smaller communities involved).



It is important to integrate all three traditions of social pedagogy when working with clients and in this case with unaccompanied minors. According to these traditions, human beings can only develop fully as part of the society. Social pedagogy aims at integrating and sees people as being capable of changing their situation. Social pedagogy promotes participation, inclusion and social interaction. (Erikson and Markstrom 2003.) By integrating all three traditions, counsellors working with minors can better support unaccompanied minors to link their individual experience to a collective or communal experience. Counsellors can help lay a strong foundation for integration by enabling and empowering unaccompanied minors to change their situation for the better and also by enabling participation into the community by lowering the threshold for interaction with other members of the community.

Empowerment is another concept which this study is based on. The seven factors and the role of counsellors within these factors discussed in this study put the theory of empowerment in practice and play a vital role in laying a foundation for the integration of unaccompanied minors. According to Adams (2008), empowerment involves a process where people individually and collectively are able to work towards helping themselves and others to enhance the quality of their lives. Counsellors support the children they work with in their education, everyday life amongst others. They provide information and help link minors to services that support their growth and help them to participate in their lives and enhance the quality of their lives.

The role of counsellors working with unaccompanied minors as discussed within the seven factors supporting integration can help expand unaccompanied minors “freedom of choice and action” and empower them by “increasing [ their ] authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect [ their lives].” (Naraya 2002).

Adams (2003, p.60) states that workers need to develop empowering ways to work with individuals. The role of counsellors as discussed in this final thesis helps counsellors working with unaccompanied minors to work in an empowering way in supporting unaccompanied minors integration both as individuals and as a group.

Both the authoritative and facilitative approach of empowerment discussed earlier in this study are used by counsellors in their work with unaccompanied minors. Counsellors at

Lukkarila use the prescriptive approach to direct the behaviour of unaccompanied minors. This include applying the law or informing unaccompanied minors about the laws, rules and regulations of Lukkarila family group home and also about their rights and obligations. For example, they are informed that they have to go to school, that they have the right to education, health care, hobbies etc. When unaccompanied minors are informed about these aspects, they may then be empowered to access these services or respond accordingly. The counsellor therefore plays a directive role. (Adams 2003.)

Counsellors also use the Informative technique in their work. They inform the children about education opportunities, available services (NGO's, hobbies, decisions and proposals made by local authorities, the local community etc. Having access to information can be very empowering to the children. Access to information can help them plan their lives better and access services better. Thereby, supporting their empowerment and integration in the sense that they are able to participate fully in their lives, in their community and in the things affecting their lives. (Adams 2003.)

The confronting technique of the authoritative approach of empowering work is also practiced by counsellors at Lukkarila. According to Adams (2003), this technique can be used to limit behaviour that goes against the law/rules. For example, if a child does not want to go to school, a counsellor may have to 'confront' them, find out why and offer support accordingly. The support offered by counsellors may then enable/empower the child to deal with any issues that may be causing them to miss school. When the education of the child is supported, their integration will also be supported as discussed previously.

On the other hand, the facilitative approach of empowering work when used by counsellors is likely more empowering than the authoritative approach. This is because facilitative techniques aim at building clients' self-confidence, self-worth and promoting their statues as citizens (Adams 2003 p.63.) There are facilitative aspects of empowering work in relation to the role of counsellors as discussed within all seven factors supporting the integration of unaccompanied minors. The role of counsellors as discussed in this study aims at supporting the integration of unaccompanied minors. Counsellors can make use of the facilitative approach of empowering work by; providing opportunities for minors to talk through their emotions, enabling them in directing their lives and finding solutions to problems affecting their lives. In addition, counsellors can play a supportive role and help the children in building self-confidence through activities and dialogue. Counsellors can

also advocate for the children and empower children to advocate for themselves. When the children feel empowered, their integration is also supported.

Furthermore, this study is based on the concept of participation. The definitions of participation as discussed previously, all stress the importance of people's involvement in a process. We can see from the result and the conclusions of this study that in order for effective integration to take place, it is important for unaccompanied minors to be involved in acquiring an education, learning the Finnish language, actively accessing different services, involved actively in the local community, involved in influencing decisions made by local authorities that affect their lives. As we have seen, counsellors play a vital role in supporting and facilitating unaccompanied minors participation (involvement) in all these aspects.

Based on the above, we can conclude that the theory of social pedagogy and the concepts of integration, empowerment and participation all work hand in hand. According to Hämäläinen (2003), social pedagogy aims to alleviate social exclusion. The role of counsellors as discussed in this study is to support the integration of unaccompanied minors. Supporting integration is one way of preventing social exclusion. Furthermore, according to Adams (2008), clients may need to be empowered in order to participate or vice versa. The role of counsellors is to empower unaccompanied minors and facilitate their participation in their lives and in the community, thereby supporting their integration.

## **9 Discussions**

The aim of this study was to find out the role of counsellors in laying the foundation for the integration of unaccompanied minors. This study identified seven factors responsible for laying the foundation for integration at the local level discussed in the previous chapter and the role of counsellors in facilitating and enabling aspects that support the integration of unaccompanied minors. The role of counsellors in laying the foundation for integration cannot be undermined.

Counsellors working with unaccompanied minors at Lukkarila are very involved with their everyday life and play a vital role in supporting their integration into the Local community. It is therefore important for counsellors to have tools that they can use as well as to be

aware of the competences that they need to be able to support the integration of unaccompanied minors. Social pedagogical training and practice can help strengthen the competences of counsellors in working with children and help them to come up with creative methods of supporting the integration of unaccompanied minors as individuals as well as a group.

Counsellors should be aware of some of the basic things they can do at the local level to help lay the foundation for integration especially when working with unaccompanied minors who have come to Finland without their parents or guardians. Developing the capacity and opportunity of unaccompanied minors through meaningful activities that build self-confidence and self-worth of the children is doubtlessly a key element to integration. This means empowering the children to play a full role in society in general, not only economically but also socially and eventually politically. Empowerment is seen in this case both as a product and as a process. As a product, empowerment increases the confidence, self-esteem and skills of unaccompanied minors. As a process, empowerment creates more accessible and focused services, based in actual rather than perceived needs of unaccompanied minors as individuals rather than as a group.

The whole process of integration begins on the first day unaccompanied minors arrive in Finland and should be facilitated through adequate and specific provision of information and services to the child. In order to be successful, counsellors working with unaccompanied minors have to convey an attitude of respect, empathy, and hospitality towards the children from the day they arrive in Finland and throughout their stay. In Lukkarila, personal guidance counsellors are assigned to each child and young person at the very beginning and the personal guidance counsellor builds a clear picture of the needs of the individual child assigned to them and support their individual and social growth so that they will eventually be able to function independently and participate fully in the society.

Previous research on this topic together with the conclusion of this study proves there is a need for studies of this kind. The theoretical framework supports the aim and objective and the study is intended to benefit the minority immigrant client group of unaccompanied minors and also benefit professionals and future professionals in supporting their integration.

There can be no social cohesion between unaccompanied minors and natives in the local community without these children feeling that they are part of the community and without the native community being receptive towards them. In other words, for effective integration to occur, unaccompanied minors and the members of the local community have to be brought in contact and both parties have to commit to making adjustments in their lives to create a community in which both groups can live together cohesively. Unaccompanied minors should be seen as an integral part and asset of the local community. They should be able to express their opinions, anxieties and hopes.

We have learned from this study that counsellors working with unaccompanied minors have a key role to play in laying the foundation for integration and creating social cohesion between the children and the local community.

The seven factors and the role of counsellors within the factors put together by this study can guide counsellors in laying the foundation for integration of unaccompanied minors. These factors have been summarised into a guide to increase the value and accessibility of this study to the working life partner. A paper copy of this final thesis including the guide has been given to the working life partner (Lukkarila) who collaborated in this study and stand to benefit directly from it. They also have a printable electronic version. The counsellors at Lukkarila will have the right to use this thesis including the 'guide' as a tool to guide them in supporting unaccompanied minors integration. The working life partner will also have the right to share the information in this study with other colleagues/agencies supporting integration.

I received a lot of positive feedback from the counsellors at Lukkarila about this study. According to the counsellors, this study is very useful, well structured, clear and straightforward. This study and the guide will be used by counsellors at Lukkarila as guidance in supporting unaccompanied minors integration and also to orient or familiarise new employees, students and other colleagues working with unaccompanied minors in other family group homes around Finland on their role in supporting the integration of unaccompanied minors. Overall, I was very satisfied and fulfilled with the process and outcome of this study.

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## Counsellors Interview Scheme

STUDY  
QUESTION

THEORIES/CONCEPTS

THEMES

How can Counsellors support unaccompanied minors in laying a foundation for integration?

Social  
Pedagogy

Activities supporting participation and Integration at a local Level

Empowerment

Empowerment at work. Authoritative / Facilitative

Participation

Attitudes

Competences

Integration

Role of counsellors

## Counsellors Interview Questions

### Background Information

1. What is your occupation?
2. Where do you work?
3. Who is your employer?
4. How long have you been working with unaccompanied minors?

### Empowerment

1. Are you familiar with the concept of empowerment?
2. If the interviewee is not familiar with the concept, its basic characteristics and principles will be explained to them.
3. Do you feel that you have been implementing to the best of your ability the principles of empowerment theory in your work?
  - If they answer yes, how?
  - If no, what have prevented you from implementing the principles of empowerment and is there anything you can do about it?
4. Do you feel you have been supporting the empowerment of the children you work with to the best of your ability?
  - If they answer yes, I will ask how?
  - If no, what have prevented you from supporting the empowerment of the children and is there anything you can do about it?
5. Do you feel empowered in your work?

### Participation

1. Do you create opportunities for children to participate in activities and decision making in the group home?
  - What kind of activities and decision making do they participate in?
2. How do you motivate children to participate in activities and decision making
3. Do you make use of volunteer work? Do you think volunteers can help support the integration of unaccompanied minors?

## Integration

1. How do you support the integration of the children you work with into the Finnish community?
2. Which kind of services are available to support integration
3. What kind of activities do you carry out with the children that can support integration?
4. Do the children interact socially with members of host community?
5. What are the children's attitudes towards integration? Are they positive or negative?
6. How do you deal with negative attitudes towards integration?
7. How do you motivate the children to integrate into the community?
8. How do you support the children you work with in preserving their own cultural identity?
9. What competences do you need as a counsellor to be able to support the integration of unaccompanied minors?
10. What is the attitude of members of the community towards asylum seekers in your opinion?
11. Do the steps taken to promote integration often involve the host community

## Social Pedagogy

1. Do you think training in social pedagogy can help counsellors to better support the integration of unaccompanied minors?

**LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR****INTEGRATION****A Guide for Counsellors Working with  
Unaccompanied Minors**

This Guide is an outcome of a study carried out in collaboration with Lukkarila family group home for unaccompanied minors. The aim of the study was to find out how counselors working with unaccompanied minors can support them in laying the foundation for integration. This study put together seven main factors that can help support the integration of unaccompanied minors and the role of counselors within these factors.

These factors include:

**Education,  
Finnish Language,  
Multi-Agency Cooperation,  
Volunteers and NGO's,  
The Local Community  
Hobbies  
Local Authorities.**

These factors have been summarised into this guide which counsellors can use to guide them in supporting unaccompanied minors integration.

## 1. EDUCATION

Education supports the social, cultural and eventually the economic lives of unaccompanied minors.

### *Role of counsellors:*

- ❖ Active co-operation:
  - Meeting regularly with teachers.
  - Knowing who is responsible for what at the school.
  - Contacting teachers and other professionals at school without hesitation.
  - Having a knowledge of other services beneficial for the children provided by the school.
- ❖ Demonstrating a positive attitude towards education:
  - Discussing positively about school
  - Acting as role models to the children e.g. talking positively about own school experiences.
  - Discussing the importance of education with the children.
- ❖ Academic support:
  - Helping with homework.
  - Providing an environment that is suitable for study.
  - Establishing a regular time for homework.
  - Removing distractions e.g. television, games etc. during homework/study time.
  - Finding out how the children are doing at school individually and apply for special services if needed to support them.
- ❖ Encouraging unaccompanied minors:
  - Showing interest in the children's education: listening actively about their experiences at school

- Praising and encouraging them when necessary.
- Encouraging them to use the library and participate in activities that support learning.
- Encouraging children to talk about both positive and negative experiences /feelings at school and give them adequate support.

### ❖ Offering emotional and social support:

- Creating opportunities at the group home where children can socialise with classmates/schoolmates.

## 2. LEARNING THE FINNISH LANGUAGE

Learning the Finnish language is an important factor in integration. The children's independence and participation in the local community is supported when they learn the local language.

### *Role of counsellors:*

- ❖ Helping them to use Finnish language through everyday communication.
- ❖ Finding events and activities where children can hear and use the Finnish language.
- ❖ Demonstrating a positive attitude towards learning a second language.
- ❖ Encouraging and supporting children with learning a new language.
- ❖ Acting as advocates for the children in the school and community;
  - Give proposals and suggestions for services that support the needs of children in learning the Finnish language.

## 3 MULTI-AGENCY/PROFESSION COOPERATION

Unaccompanied minors face a variety of challenges in a new country and their presence affect a variety of people and organisa-

tions. Hence, a variety of people and organisations have to be involved in effectively supporting their integration.

***Role of counsellors:***

- ❖ Be willing and committed to work collaboratively with other organisations and professionals.
- ❖ Have a knowledge about organisations and services that could benefit the children.
- ❖ Recommend and refer appropriate services that meet the needs of the children.
- ❖ Actively organise meetings with other professionals involved with the children.
- ❖ Effective team work skills. For example, ability to communicate across disciplines, ability to tolerate different perspectives, understand the roles of other agencies and professionals.

**4. VOLUNTEERS AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS**  
(NGO's)

Creates foundation for integration by volunteering as a friend of a refugee child and engaging in leisure activities and other activities in the community together with the children.

***Role of counsellors:***

- ❖ Create opportunities and incentives for volunteers to participate in the laying the foundation for integration.
- ❖ Provide information to organisations coordinating or involved in volunteer work.
- ❖ Provide information to minors about organisations and what they do.
- ❖ Understand the economic and social value volunteers bring to the community and encourage authorities to make policies that support volunteer work.

**5. THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

Has an important role in integration. Positive and receptive attitude create a favourable environment for integration and vice versa.

***Role of Counsellors:***

Counsellors can help reduce or eliminate xenophobia, increase mutual understanding, facilitate interaction and bridge the gap between unaccompanied minors and the local community by:

- ❖ Raising awareness in the local community about unaccompanied minors, where they come from, why they have come to Finland and how members of the community can support them.
- ❖ Organising events where both members of the local community and unaccompanied minors can participate in.
- ❖ Supporting minors own cultural Identity;
  - Linking minors with other members in the community from the same cultural background.
  - Provide opportunities where minors can practice own culture.
  - Provide information on cultural events, organisations in the community which minors can relate to.

**6. HOBBIES**

Occupy and help to develop skills, participate in activities, interact with Finnish children and foster constructive relationships with them around shared interests.

***Role of Counsellors:***

- ❖ Find out about children's interests and find them hobbies according to their interests.
- ❖ Inform the children about other sports and activities that the children may not be aware of and find out if they would be interested in trying out new things.
- ❖ Making sure that the children attend training.



- ❖ Checking in with the children's trainers and discuss children's progress and areas of support and also how support if needed can be provided.

In Cooperation with

Lukkarila

## **7. LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

Tackles the variety of issues which can directly or indirectly act as barriers to integration. They also have the authority to make provisions and policies that support integration.

### ***Role of counsellors:***

- ❖ Advocate for unaccompanied minors;
  - Identifying the needs of their clients and providing data/evidence to support their claim to local authorities.
  - Carry out research aimed at finding out which new innovations, services etc. can help support integration and advocating for the provisions of these services.



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